

Bobonich (C.) (ed.) *Plato's Laws. A Critical Guide*. Pp. viii + 245. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Cased, £50m US\$80. ISBN: 978-0-521-88463-1.

Plato's longest and most difficult dialogue, the *Laws*, was relatively neglected by philosophical scholars in the twentieth century, with the exception of Morrow's magisterial monograph, *Plato's Cretan City* (1960) and Stalley's introductory volume (1983). In the last decade, by contrast, specialists in classical philosophy have devoted significant and increasing levels of attention to the dialogue, with the publication, for example, of C. Bobonich *Plato's Utopia Recast* (2002), A. Laks, *Médiation et Coercition* (2005), and M. Schofield, *Plato: Political Philosophy* (2006). The ten essays in this volume arise from that recent wave of scholarship and advance the state of the argument on several important fronts.

The volume opens with two essays that raise broad general questions about the *Laws*. **Malcolm Schofield**, taking his cue from Aristotle's reading of the *Laws*, identifies two different projects pursued in the work. The dominant "idealizing project" is to specify the *politeia* that, while "second best" after that of the *Republic*, still aims at bringing out the best in its citizens. The subordinate "realistic" project is to devise a *politeia* that is broadly implementable in a wide range of human communities. The latter project, according to Schofield, is the source of two distinctive doctrines of the dialogue: the "mixed" constitution advocated in Book III, and the requirement in Book IV that legal statutes be accompanied by persuasive preludes.

Christopher Rowe asks how Plato intended the *Laws* to be read. While philosophical terminology and theorizing are conspicuously absent from the dialogue and, in contrast to the *Republic*, general laws rather than philosophical expertise are identified as the ultimate political authority, Rowe argues that Plato is talking over the heads of the Athenian's dull-witted interlocutors and addressing a philosophical audience of "practiced readers" who are familiar with the doctrines of the *Republic* and other dialogues and are expected import these doctrines into their reading of the *Laws*, as prompted by the cues in Plato's text.

Three essays in the volume concern ἀρετή, which the *Laws* identifies as the goal of legislation, and which Plato explicitly expands beyond its traditional connection with ἀνδρεία to include σωφροσύνη and justice (hence its rendering in these contexts as 'virtue'). **Richard Kraut** argues, against Bobonich (2002), that in both the *Laws* and the *Republic*, the virtue of ordinary citizens, even though falling short of short of the superior level of virtue achieved by the elite leadership, is nonetheless genuine virtue, in that its possessors value it for its own sake. It is thus to be distinguished from the inferior "two dimensional" virtue, motivated by fear of consequences, that is castigated in the *Phaedo* (69b).

Julia Annas agrees with Kraut that the virtues to be inculcated in the citizens of Magnesia endow them with proper motivation, not just a propensity to law-abiding behaviour. She worries about how this motivation is to be inculcated, given the emphatic refrain throughout the dialogue that the citizens must be "slaves to the laws." Her solution, inspired by Philo of Alexandria, is that the preludes to the laws

articulate and inculcate ethical ideals that the citizens are to see themselves as realizing in following the laws.

Terence Irwin focuses on the kind of “law” (*nomos*) invoked at 644d as an internal psychological force that is capable of resisting the pulls of pleasures and pains. The content of this internal law, Irwin argues, is different from that of the laws that comprise the city’s statutes. It affirms what he calls the “reflective supremacy” of one’s own good and the “practical supremacy” of the common good. As such, he argues, it functions like the internal “moral law” of Kant.

Three further essays discuss the psychological theory of the *Laws*. **Dorothea Frede** examines the famous passage that likens human beings to marionettes who are pulled by “iron” cords of pleasure, pain and their anticipations and by the “golden” cord of reason (*logismos*) or law (644c-645a). The passage does not on its own present a psychological theory, Frede argues, and needs to be supplemented by considering other texts in Books I and II that deal with the pleasures and pains of the *psyche*. Her main contention is that the theory of pleasure presupposed in this account remains consistently and solely the “restoration” account articulated in the *Philebus*. She also proposes that the “golden” cord of reason overcomes the “iron” cords of non-rational desires and affection by providing the content to them

On the latter point, Frede is in agreement with **Christopher Bobonich**, whose 2002 monograph argues that Plato’s later moral psychology (*viz.*, *Timaeus* and *Laws* in contrast to the *Republic*) no longer allows that non-rational motivations function independently of reason. Bobonich’s contribution to the present volume defends that position against a rival analysis advanced by H. Lorenz, *The Brute*

Within: Appetitive Desire in Plato and Aristotle (2006), on which the content of non-rational desires is supplied by images rather than by reasoning.

Rachana Kamtekar presents, as an alternative to both Bobonich and Lorenz, a developmental account. Taking as her cue the theory of psychic motions from the *Timaeus*, she proposes that an early age, a person's reason is involved in (indeed, distorted by) the non-rational activities of the soul, but that later in development, properly cultivated reason will be disengaged from the non-rational motions of the soul. The latter, at this stage, are mere "felt disturbances" without cognitive content; thus they are amenable to the non-cognitive training by rhythmic physical activity that is prominent in the *Laws*' program of education and whose efficacy Kamtekar is concerned to explain. One might doubt whether Kamtekar's developmental theory addresses the same question as Bobonich and Lorenz, but her essay very helpfully brings into the discussion of the *Laws*' psychology a neglected passage from book X about the cognitive "motions" of the soul (896e-898b). Like Bobonich, however, she bases most of her interpretation on the *Timaeus*. While a reader might be surprised that a volume billed as a critical guide to the *Laws* should contain two papers that are largely (and in the case of Bobonich almost exclusively) about the *Timaeus*, both Frede and Rowe concur with Kamtekar and Bobonich in supposing that the *Laws* presupposes doctrines developed explicitly only in other Platonic works.

The remaining three papers in the volume are more firmly focused on explicit doctrines of the *Laws*. **Thanassis Samaras** examines the institutions related to the family in the Magnesian *politeia*, with particular attention to the status of women. Rich in contextual historical detail, his essay emphasizes the deep social

conservatism inherent in the institution of the οἶκος that is reintroduced as the fundamental unit of social organization after being abolished for the guardians in the *Republic*. The female citizens of Magnesia, he argues, have formal equality of opportunity with men for public office, but the institution of the οἶκος itself seriously undermines their chances of actually securing high office.

Robert Mayhew surveys the textual evidence for Plato's theology in the *Laws*. In addition to the arguments against atheism in Book X, which imply that god is a soul that moves the cosmos, Mayhew surveys passages in books IV and VII relating god(s) to reason, law, virtue, chance, and the Orphic invocation of Zeus as "origin and middle" of all things. He proposes that the prohibition in Book VII against inquiry into "the greatest god and the whole cosmos" (821a) applies to questions on which Plato himself had failed to achieve sufficient clarity, including the precise relation between *nous*, the demiurge, and the world soul (an issue long debated among interpreters of Plato).

In the final paper in the volume **André Laks** considers of the famous remark in Book VII that the body of legislation devised in the *Laws* constitutes "the truest tragedy" (817a-d). In a wide ranging discussion that appeals to conceptions of tragedy in the *Republic*, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, and in the Idealist and Romantic traditions, Laks proposes that the sense in which the *politeia* of the Magnesians is 'tragic' is that it displays the "irreconcilable conflict" between the legislative ideal of rational persuasion and the necessity of threatening punishment to motivate compliance.

I would note in closing that this compact and elegantly produced volume offers readers the luxury of footnotes at the bottom of the page, but denies them the equally valuable tool of an *index locorum*.

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